



U.S. Embassy Astana

Central Asia Regional Environmental Hub Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 6

November 1-December 31

Index

I. Hub Highlights

2nd Annual Renewable Energy Conf
USAID: New Health Program
Uzbekistan Closes Border
Uzbekistan Withdraws From Grid
US Forest Svc Visits Central Asia

II. Other News

Afghan Energy And Water Programs
USAID: Better TB Treatment
Tajikistan asks donations for Rogun
Kyrgyz Hikes Elect.+ Heating Tariffs
TB Control Prgm Ends 10 Yrs Coop

III. Regional News Clips

HIV Cases On Rise In Kazakhstan
Agreement On Synthetic Fuel Plant
Closure Of Border With Uzbekistan

I. Hub Highlights

Second Annual Renewable Energy Conference

Dushanbe Tajikistan hosted the Second Annual Renewable Energy Conference on November 11, sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC), and the Renewable Energy Association of Tajikistan (REAT). Attendees came from all the Central Asian countries, Europe, Russia, and the United States. Tajikistan's First Deputy Minister of Energy and the U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan gave keynote speeches to open the conference. Among the many points raised, the presenters noted the rich potential of renewable energy, citing a number of projects in solar, wind, and small hydropower. They also pointed out the lack of financing, the fact that renewable energy is not yet commercially feasible, and investors face an unclear legal environment fraught with risk. Yet, with persistence, and proper favorable policies, renewable energy can become cheaper than oil, gas, or coal over time. Renewable energy can also stimulate economic development in rural communities, provide jobs, raise incomes, and alleviate poverty.

Ministerial Conference On Environment And Development To Be Held In Astana In 2010

The Kazakhstani Ministry of Environment hosted the Advisory Council Meeting on Preparation for the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development (MCED) to be held in Astana in 2010. The MCED is held every five years, and the next Ministerial theme will be to adopt "green growth" as the region's key strategy. This MCED will be the first one held in Central

Asia. The key issues will be bridging Asia and Europe, trans-boundary water issues, climate change adaptation, resilient development, and a green environment as central to economic development. One idea will be to regard Kazakhstan's status in Central Asia as a "bridge" between Central Asia and Europe. The Italian Ambassador (representing the European Union) said water management is a vital challenge, and Europe will attempt to improve water resource management and encourage regional cooperation. The business sector said "business as usual" is no longer possible. The government must provide adequate incentives to the business community to increase its "greenness." Such a policy could reduce poverty by providing green jobs, reduce overall environmental degradation, help businesses adapt to the effects of climate change, and ensure sufficient resources for long-term economic growth.

USAID Awarded New Health Program for Central Asia

USAID has awarded a \$15 million cooperative agreement to Population Services International to implement the Health Outreach program in 2009-2014 in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This program will work to increase access to quality HIV prevention and tuberculosis (TB) prevention and treatment interventions, to improve TB case detection, as well as to enhance the adherence to TB treatment among most-at-risk groups. Countries in the region also report epidemic levels of TB, above 110 cases per 100,000, reaching 231 in Tajikistan.

[**NOTE:** CDC has advised that, because H1N1 is also the name of one of the three seasonal flu viruses that have been in circulation for years, we use the more cumbersome but more accurate "2009 influenza A(H1N1)." Hence, all references to HINI in this newsletter are to the 2009 influenza A(H1N1).]

Kazakh Regions Take Preventive Measures Against H1N1

November 3. Interfax-Kazakhstan. Medical, border and customs services in Kazakh border regions are put on alert to deal with any possible suspected cases of H1N1. "The region is ready for going all-out to confront the flu," the head of the section for supervising quarantine and other extremely dangerous infections under the Kostanay Region department of the Kazakh Health Ministry's State Sanitary and Epidemiological Control Committee, Antonina Vengerskaya, has told the Interfax-Kazakhstan news agency. She said that special measures had been taken by customs bodies. "Our specialists held special seminars at border checkpoints. Customs bodies were instructed to intensify checks on transported cargoes. As regards passengers, the issue is for now being solved on an individual basis. Customs officers are given doctors' home and mobile phone numbers. If an officer notices that somebody feels bad, he will be checked by a physician, who promptly arrives at the scene," Vengerskaya said. Specialists say that all measures to prevent the presence of dangerous infections have been taken in East Kazakhstan Region (EKR), which borders Russia and China. In particular, the chief specialist of the regional customs control department's press service in the EKR, Berik Kuserbayev, told the Interfax-Kazakhstan news agency that the department "has certainly boosted control". He said that customs service specialists were paying heightened attention to "various meat products imported to the region". The regional department of the State Sanitary and Epidemiological Inspectorate said that all 12 border customs checkpoints in the EKR "are on alert to deal with any possible suspected cases of H1N1".

Kazakhstan Creates Vaccine Against H1N1

December 5. Interfax-Kazakhstan. Kazakh scientists have created a vaccine, "Kfzfluvac", against the H1N1 virus, the Kazakhstani Ministry of Education and Science has said. "From now on, Kazakhstan is among the few countries of the world which have their own vaccines against the insidious illness that is truly the plague of the 21st century," a press release circulated by the ministry's press service today says.

Kazakhstan And Russia Agree On Satellite Monitoring Of Caspian Sea

November 26. Interfax. Kazakhstan's National Space Agency (Kazkosmos) and Roskosmos have sealed an agreement on ground and satellite monitoring of the Caspian region, Zhumabek Zhantayev, the president of the Kazakh National Center of Space Research and Technologies, told a Thursday press conference in Almaty. Leopold Lobkovsky, the deputy director of the Shirshov Oceanography Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences told the same press conference that the earth movements would also be monitored to forecast mud volcanoes, landslides and earthquakes, or all natural phenomena which might adversely affect the oil and gas production.

Lavrov Says Russia Sees No Crisis In Caspian Legal Status Settlement

November 17. ITAR-TASS. Russia sees no crisis in the process of the settlement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Tuesday after the meeting with his Kazakhstani counterpart Kanat Saudabayev. "We see no crisis in the work on the settlement of the legal status of the Caspian Sea," Lavrov said. "These are no simple questions; the work goes on." Saudabayev noted that "Kazakhstan and Russia were the locomotives in deciding the matter of the status of the Caspian Sea." "Regrettably, the decisions on this matter depend not only on our countries but also on other three countries (Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan)," he noted. "But the stands of Russia and Kazakhstan showed the readiness for understanding." "This sea must be the sea of friendship and consideration for mutual interests," the Kazakhstani minister believes.

Kazakhstan Plans To Raise Up To \$300 Million For Solving Environmental Problems

November 16. Interfax-Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan plans to raise up to \$300 million in loans from international organizations for solving environmental problems, said Kazakh Environmental Minister Nurgali Ashimov. "At present we have already reached a preliminary agreement on raising an up to \$200 million loan via the UN Clean technology Fund and an up to \$70 million loan via the World Bank," Ashimov told the Kazakh Majilis. Moreover, according to him, Kazakhstan also reached a preliminary agreement on attracting grants from the Global Environment Facility and UNDP for a total sum of \$30 million. The funds will be allocated for solving the problems with strong organic impurities and limiting pollutant emissions.

Astronauts In Kazakhstan

December 1. A Soyuz space module carrying the 21st crew of the International Space Station, including Russian commander Roman Romanenko, Belgian flight engineer Frank De Winne, and Canadian flight engineer Robert Thirsk, has successfully landed in Kazakhstan. Due to thick fog and low temperatures, rescue helicopters were unable to transport the crew to Baikonur and on to Moscow, so the astronauts stayed in a hospital in the town of Arkalyk, located close to the landing spot. They will be transported to Moscow as soon as the weather improves.

Uzbekistan Closed Its Border with Kazakhstan Because of Concerns About H1N1

According to the Uzbekistan State Customs Committee, Uzbekistan closed the border with Kazakhstan because of concerns that H1N1 was spreading across the border. Residents of Uzbekistan can cross the border if they have invitations from Kazakhstan or "weighty" reasons to go to Kazakhstan (e.g., medical treatment in Kazakhstan or funeral). The same applies to Kazakhstan residents going to Uzbekistan. The borders with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan remain open. How long the closure of the Kazakhstan border will last is not known. Uzbekistan's closing of the border with Kazakhstan is not unusual. Uzbekistan frequently closes borders around holidays.

Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan And Kyrgyzstan Declared Not Favorable For Childhood

November 13. Chronicles of Turkmenistan. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan are among the countries classified in the report of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) as among those most disadvantageous for children. In Tajikistan, 64 out of every thousand children under the age of five do not survive, in Turkmenistan it is 48 children, in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, 38 children. Kazakhstan is in a slightly better situation, where the infant mortality rate is 30 children per thousand. The average infant mortality rate in the CIS and Central Europe is 23 children per thousand, the same as in Latin America and the Caribbean. The lowest level of infant mortality in the world is recorded in Liechtenstein and San Marino, with just two children per thousand. Sweden, Finland, Luxembourg, and Singapore have an infant mortality rate for children under five years of three per one thousand.

Uzbekistan Withdraws From Central Asian Power Grid From 1 December

November 30. Interfax. Uzbekistan is withdrawing from Central Asian's unified [electric] energy system from 1 December 2009. The authorities of Tajikistan, which is mostly dependent on electricity imports, have been warned of this officially. "Starting from 1 December 2009, Uzbekistan's all electricity networks will switch into autonomous operation mode," Uzbek Ambassador to Tajikistan Shoislom Shoqosimov said in Dushanbe earlier.

Central Asian Media Eye Uzbekistan Pull-Out From Regional Power Grid

November 30. BBC Monitoring. Uzbekistan has recently declared that it will quit the Unified Energy System of Central Asia (UESCA) on 1 December. The country's expected withdrawal from the regional power grid triggered various reaction in the media across the region after the Uzbek ambassador to Tajikistan officially warned the Tajik authorities about Uzbekistan's

decision on 23 November. Some believe that the move may have serious implications for regional countries. Tashkent announced that the power-grid system was "threatening the stability and safety of the country's own power supply" and the country was no longer able to operate within the system that links it to three neighboring countries - Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Uzbekistan: No reaction or comment on the issue has been observed in official media sources monitored by BBC Monitoring since the Uzbek diplomat made the statement last week. All signs are that, other than the cutting of one line to Tajikistan, the Uzbeks are still in the grid, operating in "parallel mode" as normal, but intent in negotiating bilateral electrical agreements with its neighbors.

Tajikistan: Unlike the Uzbek media, the media in Tajikistan have widely covered Uzbekistan's decision. The overwhelming majority of central Tajik publications were quick to blame the neighboring country for Tajikistan's chronic problems with ensuring proper electricity supply to the population and for hindering the implementation of major energy projects in the country. Tajik energy experts disagree with the Uzbek ambassador to Tajikistan, Shoqosim Shoislomov, who accused them of appropriating electricity from the UESCA as well as illegally taking money from consumers, electricity losses and so forth, the privately-owned Avesta news agency reported on 25 November.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan: The matter got short shrift in the Kazakh and Kyrgyz media with most of the coverage being factual. The Kyrgyz state-owned news agency Kabar says the system's split will make it possible to transfer to contractual monetary and financial relations between the region's countries which will "prevent the unsanctioned siphoning of electricity". The agency says not Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan alone, but Uzbekistan will also suffer from the system's collapse. If interstate agreements on mutual supplies are not signed following the system's break-up, then the situation may take a "negative scenario" the agency quoted an expert as saying. He said: "If Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan face problems in the winter period, then Uzbekistan will face them in summer." The newspaper Litsa quoted an expert as saying that if Uzbekistan makes a final decision on its withdrawal from the Central Asian energy system, there will be difficulties in supplying electricity particularly to Kyrgyzstan's Osh and Batken regions. Meanwhile, the newspaper quoted the Energy Ministry as saying that Uzbekistan's pull-out from the system "will have no impact" on Kyrgyzstan's energy system. In its issue on 27 November, the privately-owned Kyrgyz newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek says that Central Asia's energy problems can only be resolved through "joint efforts".

US Forest Service Visits Central Asia

US Forest Service representatives Brad Kinder and Lara Peterson recently visited Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. During their visit to Astana, they met with the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Hunting Committee Director, who outlined Kazakhstan's five main priorities. Kazakhstan needs modern technologies for reforestation (specifically in relation to the forest planting component of the World Bank Reforestation Project: techniques for sandy soils, limited planting periods, different species, and nurseries). Greening or reforestation around cities is also a priority, particularly in Astana. Kazakhstan has planted 45,000 trees and are planning to plant

5,000 trees a year. The Director expressed interest in cooperating on cloning techniques and modern technologies to improve re-growth/planting success. Satellite imagery is also a high priority for forest planning. Currently, Kazakhstan has limited capacity and a lack of access to good images and software outside of Almaty. The Director expressed an interest in interagency cooperation to ensure consistency across legislation for all ministries and agencies that deal with wildlife and wildlife habitat. He would like to raise the status of protected areas to UNESCO sites, but he wants to make sure legislation is consistent with UNESCO regulations. The Director also added that protected area management and tourism, including ecotourism infrastructure, environmental impact assessments, and monitoring, are high priorities for Kazakhstan.

Turkmenistan: Government Plan To Create A National Park System

According to the Ministry of Nature Protection, there are eight strictly protected nature preserves ("zapovedniks") and thirteen nature preserves with limited public access ("zakazniks"). Generally, locals that live near zakazniks can get permission to continue using the land for hunting or livestock grazing. However, other people are banned from the area. The eight zapovedniks are Amudarya, Badkhyz, Kaplankyr, Kopetdag, Koytendag, Repetek, Sunt-Hosardag, and Hazarskiy. The Government of Turkmenistan ratified the UN Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and is preparing documents for Badkhyz to receive the status of an international natural heritage site. This status would mean that Turkmenistan would receive money for the upkeep of Badkhyz, but would also have to adhere to UN requirements and allow monitoring for compliance.

The organization and operation of zapovedniks and zakazniks is regulated by the law "On Nature Protection" (1991) and the law "On Specially Protected State Natural Territories"(1992), as well as additional regulations. The laws and regulations provide a legal basis for preserving nature sites which have special ecological, scientific, cultural, educational, and recreational value. The Ministry of Nature Protection is in charge of zapovedniks. The Ministry of Nature Protection, in conjunction with local governments, oversees the Zakazniks.

Recently, local media reported on a government plan to create national parks, commenting that this is "the most effective method of managing Turkmenistan's nature preserves." According to the report, the existing zapovedniks with their strict regime of protection will serve as the center of a future national park system. Zakazniks will be incorporated into the future park system. In addition, there will be land open to the public for recreation and ecological tourism that will serve as a buffer zone for the strictly protected areas. All of these areas with their different levels of protection will constitute a national park.

Kazakhstan: World's Largest Landlocked Country

The 9th largest country in the world and home to over 100 ethnic groups, the Republic of Kazakhstan is located in Eurasia and is bordered by Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and the Caspian Sea. The area that is now Kazakhstan has been inhabited by nomadic tribes since before the Stone Age. From the 4th through the 13th century, the area was ruled by a number of nomadic nations. In the early 13th century, Mongols invaded and

established administrative districts under the Mongol Empire. By the 16th century, the tribes had developed a common language, culture, and economy. Beginning in the early 18th century, tsarist Russia began colonizing Kazakh-controlled territories. Over the next 150 years, the various regions signed treaties of protection with the Russian empire, and by the 1860s, most of the area that is now the Republic of Kazakhstan was under Russian control. In 1920, the area of present-day Kazakhstan became an autonomous republic within Russia and, in 1936, a Soviet republic. In the 1920s and 30s, the Kazakh economy, under Soviet rule, suffered disruption to its traditional nomadic and livestock-based agricultural system. From 1929 to 1934, during the period when Soviet leader Joseph Stalin was trying to collectivize agriculture, Kazakhstan endured repeated famines, similar to the Holodomor in Ukraine, because peasants had slaughtered their livestock in protest against Soviet agricultural policy (Kazakhstan: The Forgotten Famine, Radio Free Europe, December 28, 2007). In that period, at least 1.5 million Kazakhs and 80 percent of the republic's livestock died. Thousands more Kazakhs tried to escape to China, although most starved in the attempt. Robert Conquest (The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine; page 198 of Chapter 9, Central Asia and the Kazakh Tragedy) says that the application of party theory to the Kazakhs, and to a lesser extent to the other nomad peoples, amounted economically to the imposition by force of an untried stereotype on a functioning social order, with disastrous results. And in human terms it meant death and suffering proportionally even greater than in the Ukraine. Also in the 1930s and 40s, thousands were exiled from other parts of the Soviet Union to Kazakhstan, and hundreds of thousands of refugees from World War II battlefields also poured into Kazakhstan. In October 1990 Kazakhstan declared its sovereignty as a republic within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Following the August 1991 coup attempt in Moscow and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan declared independence on December 16, 1991, becoming the last of the Soviet Republics to declare independence.

II. Other News

Afghanistan

Afghan Clean Energy And Water Supply Programs Meeting Community Needs

USAID's new Afghan Clean Energy Program (ACEP, USD 83 million over four years) and Sustainable Water Supply and Sanitation project (SWSS, USD 52 million over three years) will support efforts by Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to help the needs of Afghan communities. ACEP and SWSS will design, install, and operate renewable energy sources (solar, wind, and micro-hydro), sustainable potable water systems, sanitation facilities, and hygiene education. Activities will focus primarily on rural areas, and local communities working with PRT staff will propose projects. These two programs are flexible, responding to on-the-ground, demand-driven assessments that reflect community needs and are tied directly to counter-insurgency effects.

Improving Food Security This Winter In Afghanistan

Although 2009 saw the largest harvest in Afghanistan in 30 years, food insecurity continues to affect approximately one-third of rural households, with an additional 30 percent facing periodic food security problems. The lack of purchasing power is now the primary cause of food insecurity, not the absence of food. According to USAID's Famine Early Warning System Network, supply has improved significantly following the historic wheat harvest, a 50 percent decrease in wheat prices, and generous food aid distribution. USAID's Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Productive Agriculture program increased the availability of essential inputs during the 2009 winter wheat planting season, improving the quality and increasing the quantity of the harvest. The expansion of cultivated land by one million hectares in 2008/2009 has also been a factor. Despite this progress, food insecurity among vulnerable populations is on the rise as winter 2009/2010 approaches. Food insecurity will be most pronounced in remote regions, larger cities, flood-affected areas, and among internally displaced persons. USG efforts targeting these populations are expected to assist them in meeting their food needs this winter.

Agriculture In Panjshir Fertile Ground For U.S. Programs

Small family farming is the staple of Panjshir Province's economy, making it a high priority for the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), as well as for Governor Bahlol Bahji, who declared 2009 to be the "Year of Agriculture in Panjshir." Local farmers make good use of the valley's limited arable land, but lack modern techniques and equipment, quality seeds and fertilizer, and the resources to convert wheat and corn fields to higher-value orchards. PRT activities aim to address these deficiencies, and to increase jobs and income in a manner that builds trust in Afghan institutions. Further development of Panjshir's agricultural sector will demonstrate what is possible when Afghans take firm responsibility for their own security.

USAID Agribusiness Development In Afghanistan

USAID is playing a significant role in promoting recovery and growth in agribusiness. Progress has been dramatic, albeit from a low baseline, with major expansion of production, improved rural roads and market access, and the transfer of modern technologies for agribusinesses. Irrigated areas have expanded as a result of cleaning and repairing canals, and seed and fertilizer distribution have increased yields. Programs focus on developing systems that provide critical inputs and improve value-chain outputs for on-farm and farm-to-market activities. Priorities include ensuring a reliable and affordable supply of modern seeds and saplings, as well as strengthening the supply chain for agro-chemicals, farm machinery, and accessibility to veterinary pharmaceuticals. USAID supports the delivery of Veterinary services through the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), private sector Farm Store agents, and private sector field staff. Extension services through MAIL and the private sector improve post-harvest quality control, storage, and packaging for domestic and export markets. Radio, e-mail and cell phones provide market intelligence information for producers and traders. USDA assistance is targeted toward a comprehensive program with MAIL addressing "change management," quality control, sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) standards, natural resource management, and strengthening of the policy and regulatory framework.

USAID support for exports provides growing market opportunities for Afghan producers, especially for the priority fruit and nut crops for which Afghan has been famous for centuries.

Post-harvest losses, however, remain inordinately high and the development of affordable cold storage facilities for fresh horticultural products and other perishables is a challenge due to the high cost of electricity. New programs align more strongly with the USG counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy, increase "Afghanization" for managing and implementing USG-supported activities, and improve coordination with the USG "regional platforms." We will continue with this focus as well as our effort to create jobs and prosperity through growing agricultural value-chains. In all these efforts, USAID works closely with USDA and the other civilian and military agencies in country that impact the agricultural sector. At present, we are exploring options for expanding the availability of credit in the agricultural sector.

Kazakhstan

USAID: New Methodology Leads to Better Treatment of Multi-Drug Resistant (MDR) Tuberculosis (TB)

Adherence to TB treatment protocols has increased from 57 percent to 96 percent in East Kazakhstan Oblast after the USAID-funded TB CAP project helped introduce new approaches in the oblast's TB facilities earlier this year. This oblast has one of the highest MDR TB rates (35.8 percent in 2008) in the country, largely due to the high number of penitentiary facilities (the oblast houses 14 of them) and a huge territory. The TB CAP project trained 20 key TB specialists in the oblast to lead implementation of the customized MDR TB treatment protocols in the oblast's TB facilities and has been helping to monitor their application. Adherence of patients to the treatment will prevent the spread of TB among population and preclude the mutations of TB to resistant forms that are much more difficult to treat.

USAID's Global Development Alliance Advances Ecotourism

Eight holiday locations featuring ecotourism were created and 15,000 tourist days generated an income of more than 60 million tenge (\$400,000) as a result of a 5-year Kazakhstani ecotourism program implemented by the Eurasia Foundation for Central Asia with funding from USAID, ExxonMobil, and the Global Ecological Foundation. The program sought to facilitate rural economic development and environmental awareness by generating holiday opportunities in Kazakhstan. The program also helped create a bachelor program in Ecotourism and a series of courses for tourism managers at the Turan-Astana University to ensure continued development of this sector.

USAID Completes 15 Years of Health Reform Support Projects

USAID has completed a series of projects under the title "Zdrav" ("Health" in English) that worked to reform the post-soviet health system in Kazakhstan since 1994. These projects helped the country design the State Health Care Reform Program for 2005-2010 and, more recently, develop the \$297 million World Bank Health Project that finances Kazakhstan's shift from hospital-based care to the less costly and more effective primary care. USAID also helped introduce the concept of family medicine where the entire family is attended by one general practitioner and trained over half of the country's family doctors. Thousands more doctors were trained to implement the health care payment systems, to use scientifically-proven health care

approaches, and to improve the maternal and child health care. The project also helped local partners revise 200 clinical protocols for the treatment of priority medical conditions.

Minister Says 22 Billion Tons Of Waste Accumulated In Kazakhstan

November 16. Kazinform. A total of 22bn t of production and consumer waste have been accumulated in Kazakhstan, over 16bn t of which are technogenic mineral formations and 6bn t of toxic waste, Environment Protection Minister Nurgali Ashimov has said while making a speech "About problems of comprehensive waste processing. The minister said that there were no production waste free regions in Kazakhstan. A total of 5,000 ha of land are polluted with oil. Situation with municipal waste is not better. Only seven per cent of solid domestic waste sites are legalized and only two per cent of this waste is recycled. Only 25 per cent of the country's residential areas have organizations collecting and removing municipal waste.

Nazarbayev Signed Decree On Conferring Of State Award In Science, Technology

November 17. The Times of Central Asia. The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, signed on November 9, 2009 the decree on conferring State Award of Kazakhstan of 2009 in science and technology, the agency reports citing official mass media. Eight employees of the National Nuclear Center of Kazakhstan have been given the State Award. "Having considered recommendations of the commission, I have decided to confer the State Award of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 2009 in science and technology to the authors for a series of works on the theme Basic Researches in Nuclear and Radiation Physics on the basis of the advanced experimental nuclear-physical installations of the Institute of Nuclear Physics of the National Nuclear Center of Kazakhstan and creation on their basis of nuclear and radiation technologies."

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyz Government Approves Increases In Electricity, Heating Tariffs

November 12. 24.kg. The Kyrgyz government has approved increases in tariffs for electricity and heat energy. As of 1 January 2010, the price of 1 kilowatt-hour of electricity will be 1.5 soms for all consumers (43.81 soms = one dollar). On average, the price of electricity for consumers in Kyrgyzstan will double while the price of heat energy will increase five- to ten-fold.

Kyrgyz Pensioners Protest Against Energy Price Rise

November 20. Interfax. Pensioners in Bishkek [Kyrgyz capital] have staged a protest against a rise in electricity and heating tariffs, and demanded an increase in pensions and compensatory payments. The official protest involving about 100 old people was organized by the NGO Society for the Social Protection of People. Electricity tariffs will be increased by 100 per cent and heating charges by 200 per cent in Kyrgyzstan from 1 January 2009. Also, one more increase is expected to take place in the middle of 2010. The Society for the Social Protection of People thinks that the increase in the energy tariffs will lead to a situation in which old-age people's

pensions will be not large enough to pay for utilities or the required amount of charges will practically be commensurate with that of their pensions.

Compensation Ordered For Low-Income People In View Of Rise In Tariff

November 13. AKIpress. Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev signed a decree "On arranging compensatory payments in connection with changes in the tariff policy", on 13 November 2009. According to the decree, with the aim of maintaining the living standards of the country's pensioners and ensuring a common approach in conditions of the amended tariff policy for energy resources, it is established that, as of 1 January 2010, 200 soms worth of monthly compensatory payments for electricity will be added to pensions that do not exceed 4,000 soms and are given in line with the law "On state pension and social insurance", the president's press service said.

Tajikistan

Tajik Power Plant Project More Than Half Completed - Iran Envoy

November 17. Asia-Plus. Fifty-five per cent of construction and assembling work has been completed at the Sangtuda-2 hydroelectric power station, which is one of Iran's major projects in Tajikistan, the Iranian ambassador to Tajikistan, Ali Asghar She'rdust, said at a news conference today. He said that the main and difficult work in the implementation of this project had already been done. "All that remains to be done is to connect big hydro turbines, some of which have already been delivered to Tajikistan and some are on their way. Some of these turbines are produced in Iran and others in China," Ali Asghar She'rdust added. The ambassador noted that the Iranian side would do its utmost "to help friendly and fraternal Tajikistan to resolve issues with the shortage of electricity. According to him, out of the \$260 million meant for the construction of this facility, over \$125 million have already been spent. Out of this sum, \$100 million were spent by Iran and \$25 million by Tajikistan. The facility is scheduled to be commissioned in 2010. The Iranian government allocated a \$180 million loan for the construction of the Sangtuda-2 hydroelectric power station.

Tajik Senate Urges People To Make Donations For Power Plant Construction

November 20. ITAR-TASS. Tajikistan's Senate (the Tajik parliament's upper house) has appealed to the people of the country and urged "conscious citizens" to step up the making of personal donations for the completion of the Roghun hydroelectric power plant's construction. "It is impossible to solve the country's energy independence problems and ensure its further economic development without putting this strategically important facility into operation," a message sent to all regions of the country today says. Even the upper house's Speaker Mahmadsaid Ubaydulloyev mentioned the possible amount of the donations - \$154 million - at the Senate's meeting today. He said that "this amount will be collected if each of the country's 2.14 million working citizens transfer their average monthly salary, amounting to 80 dollars, to the Roghun's fund." The head of the Senate, who is also mayor of Dushanbe, reminded people that he had transferred his Speaker salary in June for Roghun's construction.

Rasht Valley, Where Food Is The Main Security Challenge

A broken, gravel road links Dushanbe to the Rasht Valley. The 135 mile drive to Garm takes four hours, a major challenge to Rasht farmers seeking markets for their produce. With most young men working in Russia, Rasht Valley women eke out a living by farming the small patches of arable land along the mountain walls. 8,000 Rasht men are working abroad, mostly in Russia. Although living/working conditions for migrants in Russia have improved over the last year, the economic downturn has led to lower remittances and several families reported that they had not received money for several months. Despite the downturn, Rasht men have not returned to the valley in large numbers. Those that have returned for the winter plan to travel to Russia again in the spring since Russia offers more opportunities than does farming in Tajikistan. Poor roads and poor infrastructure are the biggest challenges for the Rasht Valley. The long drive to Dushanbe limits the ability of farmers to bring goods to market. Electricity is on only a few hours per evening in Garm and less in Rasht villages. Besides agriculture, there are no opportunities for legitimate employment in Rasht and no manufacturing base in the district.

Turkmenistan

GE Turbines Boost Electricity Capacity In Turkmenistan

Chalyk Energy, a Turkish company, and General Electric (GE) are nearing completion of a project to build a new power station in Balkanabat, the capital city of Balkan Province in western Turkmenistan. According to an article in the November 17 issue of state-run newspaper Neutral Turkmenistan, the province is currently undergoing an industrial and construction boom. Six years ago, three GE-produced turbines were installed at Balkanabat's old power station, bringing the station's capacity to 126 megawatts (MW). Balkanenergo replaced some parts of the power distribution system at the station to improve efficiency, and the station operations were computerized. Turkmenistan produces a surplus of power that it exports to Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Tajikistan.

USAID Tuberculosis Control Program Concludes Ten Years Of Cooperation

On September 10, USAID and its implementer, Project HOPE, held a conference to mark the completion of their second five-year tuberculosis (TB) program in Turkmenistan. From 2000 to 2009, this program cooperated with the Ministry of Healthcare and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan to strengthen Turkmenistan's National TB Program. During the course of its work, USAID/Project HOPE supported expansion of the TB-Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS) program from a pilot stage to a national level. (DOTS is the World Health Organization's recommended approach to treat and control TB.) Additionally, the project strengthened coordination between specialized TB services and primary health care; provided recommendations to strengthen TB control and laboratory operations; helped develop a logistics management information system for TB drugs; and conducted advocacy, communication, and social mobilization activities among the Turkmen population. Going forward, activities focused on combating multi-drug resistant TB will continue under a new USAID five-year program, which is currently under procurement.

Uzbekistan

USAID Completes its Tuberculosis (TB) Program in Uzbekistan

The 5-year, \$4 million USAID-funded Tuberculosis Control Program that was implemented by Project HOPE helped the country achieve the 73 percent success rate for the treatment of TB – a rate that is close to Eurasia’s regional average of 75 percent. To help Uzbekistan achieve this result, the program informed 22 million Uzbek residents about TB symptoms and the importance of timely medical care through TV and radio campaigns, direct educational sessions, and various other methods. The program also taught 4,000 health care providers on the World Health Organization-recommended TB treatment strategy of Directly Observed Therapy Short-Course (DOTS), counseling of patients, management of TB control, TB and HIV co-infection, multi-drug resistant TB, and drug management.

Farmers Improve Water Use and Agricultural Productivity

To enhance harvests and prevent conflicts among farmers, USAID’s Water Users Association Support Program (implemented by Winrock) promoted equitable and effective water distribution and encouraged farmers to invest in irrigation networks in 2006 - 2009. The project helped develop 30 democratically organized, sustainable, and effective water user associations in Bukhara, Jizzakh, Samarkand, and Namangan oblasts. With USAID’s support, the associations rehabilitated or opened 79 kilometers of irrigation and drainage canals; installed nearly 700 water gates and measuring devices; built 100 water distribution points, as well as received office furniture and equipment for canal maintenance. These efforts have improved irrigation of 35,000 hectares of land used by 235,000 people. Additionally, water use in the rehabilitated areas declined by 20 percent and net incomes increased by 13 percent.

A Donation Brings International Accreditation Closer

USAID’s AgLinks Project procured a \$68,000-worth High Performance Liquid Chromatograph for the Tashkent City Center for Testing and Certification to strengthen its ability to screen agricultural and food products for organic contaminants. The center tests food and agricultural products for compliance with the standard quality and safety requirements for internal and external markets. Producing consistently valid test results on such products is required for international trade and societal health. This equipment is a significant step for the center towards obtaining ISO 17025 certification – the main standard used by testing and calibration laboratories to implement a quality system and is the basis for accreditation from an Accreditation Body.

III. Regional News Clips

Note: Baktiyor Mukhamadiev's excellent **Weekly Central Asian ESTH News**, sent from our Tashkent office, contains most of the news events that are happening in the region. This section modestly supplements his reporting.

World Aids Day

December 1. Express K. Today is World AIDS Day. There are 13,500 HIV cases officially registered in Kazakhstan, 1,758 of which were discovered this year. However, according to Vladimir Slesarev, director of the Republic Center for Preventing and Fighting HIV, the number of HIV infections this year has decreased in comparison with the figures from last year. But there are more young people infected now – 78.5 percent are age 20-39 – including 318 cases registered among children under 14. There were 2,564 cases registered this year in Karaganda province, but doctors recommend multiplying this figure by ten because many people don't realize that they are virus carriers. On the eve of World AIDS Day, Karaganda medical workers and volunteers seek to counter prejudices connected with HIV/AIDS.

Almost 350 New HIV Cases Logged In Kazakh Ex-Capital In Jan-Oct 2009

November 5. Interfax-Kazakhstan. A total of 349 new HIV cases were uncovered in Almaty in January-October [2009], the chief doctor of the city centre for preventing and fighting AIDS, Marat Tukeyev, has reported. "In the first 10 months of this year, 349 new HIV cases were uncovered in Almaty. Of them, 247 people (71 per cent) are residents of Almaty, 102 people (29 per cent) are from other towns," says Tukeyev's report, which was issued today. Almaty population is about 1.5 million; it is Kazakhstan's largest city.

Kazakh Expert Says HIV Cases On Rise In Country

November 30. Interfax-Kazakhstan. There are 13,463 HIV positive people in Kazakhstan, Sholpan Karzhaubayeva, deputy director-general of the national centre for healthy lifestyle (NCHWL), said today at a news conference dedicated to the World AIDS Day, which is marked on 1 December every year, the [Kazakhstan Today] news agency has said quoting official media outlets. Karzhaubayeva said that there were 13,463 HIV positive people in Kazakhstan, including 318 children under 14. AIDS was established in 962 patients, including 63 children under 14. She said that the number of HIV positive people was steadily growing in Kazakhstan. The high rate of HIV cases has been logged in Almaty - over 182 cases per 100,000 people, and over 158 cases in Pavlodar and over 129 cases in Karaganda per 100,000 people living in the regions. The number of HIV positive people in Kazakhstan, who contracted the disease through sexual intercourse grew from 5 per cent in 2001 to 23 per cent in 2009.

Kazakhstan Confirms Closure Of Border With Uzbekistan

November 23. Interfax-Kazakhstan. Uzbekistan has unilaterally closed the state border with Kazakhstan, the official representative of the Kazakh Foreign Ministry, Yerzhan Ashikbayev, has said. "We confirm that the border is closed.... We have no information about the motives of this decision," he said at a press briefing in Astana today. He also noted that the closure of the border was not initiated by the Kazakh side. "We have no official information, even though an inquiry to this effect was made," Ashikbayev said. However, he said that the border was not closed for Kazakh citizens coming back from Uzbekistan and Uzbek citizens returning from Kazakhstan.

SAR, Uzbekistan Sign Agreement On Synthetic Fuel Production Plant

November 06. ITAR-TASS. The South African Republic and Uzbekistan have signed an agreement on the construction of a plant for the synthetic fuel production worth of 2.5 billion U.S. dollars, the South African Press Association (SAPA) news agency said on Friday. According to SAPA, the sides will set up a joint venture with the participation of Uzbekistan's petroleum company Uzbekneftegaz, Malaysia's Petronas and South African Sasol. Proceeding from the agreement, the sides will build a plant for refining natural gas into synthetic gasoline in Central Asia. Uzbekistan has vast fields of natural gas, but it is mainly sold at low prices on the domestic market. The new plant is expected to produce annually about 1.3 million tonnes of synthetic diesel fuel of advanced purification. Sasol is the world's biggest producer of synthetic fuel. Three Sasol's plants are operating in South Africa over many decades. They process coal into synthetic gasoline.

Central Asia Regional Environmental Hub

The Central Asia Regional Environment Officer (REO) is responsible for monitoring and reporting on trans-boundary environment, science, technology, and health issues in six countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan.

Bruce Hudspeth, Regional Environment Officer (REO)

hudspethbk@state.gov

Tel: +7-7172-70-21-00

U.S. Embassy Astana, Kazakhstan

[<http://astana.state.gov/>]

Bakhtiyor Mukhamadiev

Environmental and Scientific Affairs Specialist

mukhamadievbr@state.gov

Tel: +251-11-517-4283

U.S. Embassy Tashkent, Uzbekistan

[<http://tashkent.state.gov/>]

U.S. Department of State, Office of Oceans, Environment, and Science

[<http://oes.state.gov/>]

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs

[<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/>]

Regional Hub Website and Past Newsletters

[Pending]